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Saul Bellow's Henderson the Rain King: A Fusion of the Comic and the Serious

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Saul Bellow's Henderson the Rain King:

A Fusion of the Comic and the Serious

(TITLE)

BY

GEORGE WILLIAM RUSSO

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts in English

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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SAUL BELLOW'S *HENDERSON THE RAIN KING*: A FUSION OF THE COMIC AND THE SERIOUS

BY

GEORGE WILLIAM RUSSO

B. A. in English, Eastern Illinois University, 1977

ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English at the Graduate School of Eastern Illinois University

CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS
1979

Bellow's comic vision points to a compromise between the romantic notion that self-perfection is attainable and the pessimistic notion that man is ultimately impotent and thus destined to fail. Through Henderson, Bellow shows that although man does not--and ultimately cannot--completely free himself of somatic demands and limitations, he is nevertheless not defeated by them and thus not left a victim of emotionless observations.

Bellow draws upon four sources in Henderson's nature to create the humor in the novel and highlights Eugene Henderson as a comic hero by dramatizing that Henderson proves to be his own ironist. These sources can be subsumed under the general heading of the body's encumbrance of the spirit. The first is Henderson's highly affective nature which often forces him to act in contradictory and inconsistent ways. The second source of the comic lies in Henderson's unsophisticated manners and robust speech, his slang idiom, and the rugged humor which Henderson initiates, all of which tend to highlight the incongruity of a character rooted in the physical world seriously pursuing spiritual development. Thirdly, Bellow finds a source of comedy in Henderson's exaggerated sense of fate, in his obsession with personal misfortune and mortality. His relentless brooding and rebellion against life's terms ultimately take on a comically rigid and incongruous quality in terms of the uncommon advantages and material wealth

that Henderson enjoys. The fourth and most important source of comedy stems from Bellow's ironic dramatization of Henderson's concerted attempts to deny the inescapable needs and desires of physical being. This denial becomes as comic as Henderson's gigantic body itself, in that his body repeatedly demands to be recongnized. Bellow makes unmistakably clear, nevertheless, that Henderson's move toward accommodation encompasses both and awareness and acceptance of his spiritual and somatic being directly in relation to the demands of reality in a physical world.

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Chapter 1

Henderson: A Summary of the Serio-Comic Quest

Saul Bellow's early novels[1] focus on the unique predicaments of individuals who attempt to cope with chaos and death in modern life. Coping becomes an overwhelming job because the Bellow hero struggles to assert his identity in a world where self and ordinary existence are made to seem insignificant, dwarfed by the immensity of society and by the finality of a death-dealing universe. Because each protagonist attempts to get a grip on existence--that is, to perceive meaning and value in the chaos--he is burdened by what Alfred Kazin calls a "speculative quest,"[2] a need to assimilate his particular destiny within the general scheme of human destiny. At times, life becomes a nightmare of psychological conflicts. The hero perceives his own misfortune and impending doom in the people around him while striving to accommodate himself to a hostile environment which engulfs him.

Bellow's heroes not only instinctively hunger for human brotherhood and, ultimately, love, but also seek to alleviate the diffidence and paralysis which accompany immersion in the hostile environment. Dramatized in the protagonists' struggles to perceive meaning and value in life is Bellow's reaction to the pessimistic notion of human impotence before the superior forces of life. Although Bellow's heroes strive to find an inner, spiritual, peace in the chaos,

their spiritual aspirations are at times encumbered by their physical bodies. This encumbrance, however, is not treated as tragic. On the contrary, Bellow treats the encumbrance of the spirit by the body as a comic characteristic inherently inseparable from human nature.

All the protagonists of Bellow's early work possess comic flaws or peculiarities which arise from their bodily existence and which characterize their affective natures; these comic flaws or peculiarities, moreover, are inseparably linked to the spiritual struggle to find meaning and value in a chaotic universe. Bodily existence includes much more than mere flesh and bone; it involves intense feelings and desires, appetites, and acute sensibilities, all of which are deeply rooted in the body. Bellow sees the physical side of man's being as inextricably linked to his spiritual being, expressing itself at times in a comic or absurd manner, especially when an intense and questing spirit is involved. What makes Bellow's work so uniquely comic is his characteristic use of ironic contrast to heighten the incongruity which may sometimes exist between the desires of the spirit and those of the body in order to dramatize his sympathetic recognition that the body is essential to the functioning of the spirit, that the spirit exercises its power solely through the body. Perhaps the best illustration of Bellow's comic mode is found in the protagonist of Henderson the Rain King (1959), Bellow's fifth work. In Eugene Henderson, one sees Bellow dramatizing the epitome of the anxious and questing spirit struggling to aspire--

but weighed down by physical being. Henderson embodies the comic characteristics, the affective nature, and the intensely questing spirit of the typical Bellow hero. Bellow takes great pains to show in a more pronounced way than in his earlier novels that although an immense and stubborn body may at times respond comically and even ill-naturedly and cantankerously to the desires of the spirit, the comic element rooted in physical being is inextricably part of the spirit's attempt to exercise its power through the body.

One can find the makings of the middle-aged and disillusioned Henderson in Joseph, the protagonist of the Dangling Man (1944), Bellow's seminal work. Although on a serious philosophical quest, Joseph does not always act in a manner that one might expect of a person on such a quest. He argues vehemently, for example, with a waitress over burnt toast and with his niece over similar trifles. Although these actions may not make the reader laugh, they do illustrate Bellow's use of ironic contrast to ridicule Joseph's seemingly absurd outbursts of temper over such inconsequential matters as burnt toast. Ironically, although Joseph deplores violence, he physically assaults his landlord in a rage over the lack of heat in his apartment and administers a "spanking" to his niece, Etta, in his brother's home because he feels tha she has become a disrespectful and "spoiled" girl, corrupted by the wealth that she enjoys. Such displays of temper and violence are hardly consistent with a man who is contemplating such

serious matters as the meaning of personal destiny in an immense and modern society. Augie March, in The Adventures of Augie March (1949), though not as self-conscious or as driven as Henderson, is nonetheless preoccupied with a serious quest for an acceptable fate, for "a fate good enough" (p. 355). Yet convinced as he is that life is a quest, Augie acts at times like th traditional schlemiel,[3] bungling his way through life as Henderson does later and receiving almost as many bruises and lumps as Henderson--as a union orgainzer for the CIO and as a trainer of Caligula, the eagle who never quite learns to hunt giant lizards in Mexico. Bellow affectionately ridicules and cherishes the good-natured humor in Augie and his natural ability for getting into mischief. The sympathetic contrast between the aspirations of the spirit and the desires of the body is also highlighted in Bellow's middle-aged protagonists. Asa Leventhal, in The Victim(1947), and Tommy Wilhelm, in Seize the Day (1956), share Henderson's over-weight and grievance-ridden qualities, encumbered as they are by their affective natures and by the size and weight of their bodies. Although Leventhal attempts to contemplate the validity of Kirby Allbee's irrational claims about him, Leventhal's introspection is hindered by the nervousness and anxiety caused by Allbee's sudden appearance. Allbee has appeared seemingly out of nowhere to claim that Leventhal had ruined him out of hate for "Gentiles" and that betrayal is the key to "success" in modern society. Because Leventhal feels that

Allbee is following him wherever he goes, his anxiety and nervousness increase, hindering his inquiry into the accuracy of these claims. His body reacts comically at times to the stress of the situation when, for example, he thinks that he sees mice in his apartment. In addition, Leventhal feels a vague presence in his bedroom when he tries to sleep even though he is quite alone, another comic reaction of his body to the intense introspection and to the uncomfortable intrusion of Allbee into his life. Tommy Wilhelm's rather gross bodily habits and dishevelled appearance give a comic tinge to the pathos which he evokes from being a "loser" and a misfit in the world of harsh materialism. Alienated from his father and from society and oppressed by his physical being, not unlike Henderson, the disillusioned Wilhelm suffers intensely over the misfortunes and "wrong decisions" which plague his life and which cause his economic failure. Wilhelm's spirit searches for meaning and value in the materialistic society which has driven him to clutch at straws, but his unclean table manner, slovenly appearance, not to mention his unique way of watching the Dodgers on television--while drinking gin from a coffee cup--dramatize Bellow's awareness that the body may sometimes respond incongruously to the desires of the spitit, that body and spirit are inextricably linked to each other in human existence.

Although critics disagree as to the quality of these early novels, all take them seriously because they dramatize in plausible environments the on-going battle of the

self to assert its identity in the framework and context of an immense society set, ultimately, in the death-dealing and chaotic universe. For reasons to be noted later, such critics are not in agreement about the underlying seriousness of Henderson the Rain King. Yet Eugene Henderson also battles the same inimical and debilitating forces in his struggles with existence. At fifty-five, Henderson is acutely aware of his own mortality and death and feels that his life in America has become increasingly unbearable, a nightmare of psychological conflicts, because he perceives his own death in the destruction of loved ones and of the human creatures around him. Henderson, as a result, is alienated from Lily, his second wife, and from his children because he finds that his responsibilities to his family place too great a burden upon his already intolerable existence. In addition, Henderson is unable to derive any pleasure or comfort from his great material wealth or from the past eminence of his family whose greatness goes back at least to Federal times. Although Henderson is the heir of the three-million dollar estate and the scion of distinguished statesmen and social and literary critics, he is nonetheless distraught by the senseless death of his older brother Dick, who would have inherited the Henderson estate and fortune, and cannot bear the alienation from his late father, a renowned scholar and friend of William James and Henry Adams, who made Henderson feel that the greatness of the

family line ended with Dick. "Nobody truly occupies a station in life any more," Henderson laments. "There are mostly people who feel that they occupy the place that belongs to another by rights. There are displaced persons everywhere" (p. 34). In the framework and context of American society, Henderson considers himself to be one of the "displaced persons," unable to "justify" his wealth and the family's eminence through his own efforts. Nevertheless, Henderson struggles to find a way to live up to the historical greatness of his family by attempting to distinguish himself through his own efforts as a stay to the death and chaos that he perceives around him.

Believing that previous generations have accomplished all the great and important tasks, Henderson raises pigs on the 200-year old estate and identifies with the plight of his "clever doomed animals" (p. 21) as a comment on his inheritance and the social pretensions of his ancestors who stole land from the Indians and cheated others to build the great estate. He also attempts to communicate with the spirit of his late father by playing the violin, hoping thus to lessen his fear of death. When these efforts fail, Henderson tries to "work off" his anxiety by expending great amounts of energy chopping wood, pouring concrete, and farming his estate. But despite his physical efforts his fear and anxiety only increase. As a result, Henderson becomes more and more disillusioned, ill-natured and disagreeable, seemingly unable to live up to his aspirations or to free

himself of his obsession with personal fulfillment and development. Ironically, Henderson's ranting and raving at the breakfast table one morning about, of all things, some "wasted" money causes the unfortunate death of Miss Lenox, the housekeeper, who was literally scared to death by Henderson's temper tantrum. In the corpse of Miss Lenox, Henderson perceives first hand his own annihilation and failure to live up to his aspirations. The impact of her death upon him is so great that he can see no recourse but to "get out," to flee from his wealth and from the modern world, where, despite his great desire to find meaning and value, he has succeeded only in acting the bum. Henderson exclaims: "The last little room of dirt is waiting. Without windows. So for God's sake make a move, Henderson, put forth effort.... Death will annihilate you and nothing will remain, and there will be nothing left but junk. Because nothing will have been and so nothing will be left. While something still is--now! For the sake of all, get out"(p.40). Eschewing his wealth and the modern world, he embarks for Africa to hunt for life's noble deeds, to find himself and perhaps the truth, and most of all to appease the vague, yet gnawing "I want, I want"which his wealth and materialistic existence have been unable to allay.

Henderson's African experiences ultimately bring him to accept responsibility for himself and for others; this change is marked by a movement away from a preoccupation with self toward an awareness and acceptance of the harshness and death which are inextricably part of existence.

Henderson initially greets Africa "with a certain emotion" (p. 42), that is, with the perhaps romantic hope that he will finally be able to discover his own personal retort to death and chaos and thus ameliorate the psychological unrest, the anxiety, he experiences. In his encounter with the Arnewi tribe, the complacent cow-worshippers, Henderson sees his chance to help the unfortunate tribe whose sacred cows are dying of thirst because the water supply is polluted with frogs and therefore, according to tribal law, unfit for use. At the same time, Henderson hopes to acquire a degree of the greatness and prestige of Sir Wilfred Grenfell, his idol, by following the dictates of what Henderson calls "my service ideal," the innate desire to perform acts of good will in the name of humanitarian service. Although Henderson is introduced to the "Grun-tu-molani, " man want to live, philosophy of the "Women of Bittahness," he nonetheless causes unexpected catastrophe by destroying the tribe's cistern with his "homemade" bomb. Ironically, Henderson transforms his flashlight, an instrument of light, into an instrument of darkness and destruction with the violent technology which he also brings with him. He, therefore, becomes rudely aware of the consequences of his actions and begins to see that indeed life is composed of harsh events and unexpected occurrences. In addition, Henderson is forced to accept responsibility for himself and for his actions in the face of his failure to follow in

the footsteps of Grenfell, the renowned medical missionary.

Similarly, in his encounter with the aggressive Wariri tribe, the lion-worshippers, Henderson is once again immersed in the chaos and harshness of life through his experiences with the culturally controlled "chaos" prescribed for the performance of the tribe's fertility ceremony. Although Henderson distinguishes himself through feats of great strength and becomes the rain king ("Sungo") of the tribe, thus eliminating the severe drought and attaining his goal of humanitarian service, the Wariri strip Henderson of his clothes and, in accordance with tribal custom, force him to undergo the humiliating and orgiastic Sungo initiation ritual. Abandoned stark naked in a pool of mud and filth, Henderson begins to realize from his hapless plight that indeed life is harsh and that the rather brutal and chaotic coronation rite actually represents the harsh and terrifying side of existence. Under the instruction of King Dahfu, Henderson's awareness of himself and of life is broadened and deepened. He learns to confront existence by attempting to act the lion, striving to absorb the ferocity, passion, and voice of the lion into himself, in contrast to Dahfu, whom the lion has taught to be graceful and agile. In addition, Dahfu awakens a sense of wonder in Henderson by the way in which he accepts the duties--and dangers-- of his position as king; that is, Dahfu serenely performs the various duties of his office while knowing full well the

consequences of failing in his procreative function and of failing to capture the "right" lion, Gmilo. After the death of Dahfu, Henderson resolves to return to Connecticut, convinced now that love makes existence tolerable and gives meaning and value to life. Henderson takes the lion cub with him as a remembrance of Dahfu; it also serves to reinforce Henderson's resolution to meet existence with the intensity and ferocity characteristic of the lion.

The novel ends on an affirmative note, with Henderson dancing over the Arctic coldness while carrying a young orphaned boy in his arms. Bellow dramatizes in this touching scene Henderson's movement away from the selfish concern for personal mortality and development; Henderson now seeks involvement with others through love, and resolves to confront the chaos of existence with courage. Although Henderson's comic resolution to enroll in the medical school at John Hopkins at his age of fifty-five seems to be a rather crazy and impulsive decision, Bellow shows, through Henderson's energetic dance, that Henderson is now freed from his anxiety about death and can therefore seek an imaginative, if not eccentric, way to exercise his wholesome desire to help others. Henderson's unconditional acceptance and appreciation of life dramatizes that indeed Henderson has found a personal retort to death and chaos. His quest ultimately redeems him by moving him to change, to accept responsibility for himself and for others.

A number of critics suggest that Henderson the Rain King is flawed because Eugene Henderson's comic characteristics and intense suffering are too exaggerated and wild to deal effectively with the traditionally serious "themes" of the Bellow novel. Ihab Hassan criticizes the novel because he feels that Bellow does not succeed in making the reader feel the detached and ironic sympathy which would have placed Henderson's exaggerated and comic seriousness, his clownery and shenanigans, in a perspective revealing what Henderson has learned; to Hassan the novel promises more than it reveals.[4] Ralph Freedman views Henderson as a "symbolic hero of the romantic tradition" but finds that the "quixotic distortion" that Bellow gives to Henderson ultimately dissolves into a hoax because Bellow lacks control of his world in the novel and is too impatient to hurry on to what Freedman perceives as Bellow's main task, that of "symbolic satire in the African setting" of Henderson's journey toward self-realization.[5] Daniel Hughes argues that while the comedy in the novel prevents the hero from being reduced to the level of a victim of "emotionless observation," Bellow does not succeed in making Henderson's discovery and triumph appear as significat and forceful as they really are because Bellow doesn't place Henderson back in society.[6] Michael Allen feels that in the process of creating for the reader his enormous and tensed-up physique, Bellow tries to evoke more pathos about Henderson's incoherence and psychological unrest than he

"can afford to admit."[7] Expressing perhaps the most adverse criticism of uproarious and energetic Henderson, Donald Malcolm feels that the trouble with Henderson is that he is simply "too stupid" to learn anything from his suffering and exploits, that Henderson is nothing more than an irresponsible and inept idiot who journeys to a magical never-never land.[8]

Henderson the Rain King (1959) is nevertheless a serious novel as its critics have shown. Although Eugene Henderson is Bellow's most outrageously comic, at times wild and bumptious, hero, Bellow does not lose control of his high spirits as some critics suggest; nor does Bellow fail to awaken in the reader a sense of things permanent or large. Rather, the comic elements in the novel point to the serious theme--namely, that Henderson must accept what he cannot escape: the chaos and death inherent in existence and, ultimately, the human limitations--and mortality-- which may hinder or even block an aspiring spirit in search of meaning and value. Through the use of ironic comedy, Bellow dramatizes that an anxious and questing spirit struggling to assert itself may at times expose and highlight the inherent comic qualities of human limitations in the hero's character; in doing so Bellow takes great pains to show in Henderson the Rain King that the incongruity between the desires of the spirit and the sometimes comic, often wild and farcical, result of the hero's attempts to comply with them is in fact the crux of

Henderson's comic dilemma and therefore deserves serious attention. As dramatized in the novel, human flaws and peculiarities are inextricably part of the human condition, the earthly existence in the physical world, and therefore are inescapable. For Bellow, the irony arising from the incongruity between the expectations inspired by the spirit and the body's refusal or failure to meet these expectations, the often ironic consequences of the body betraying or hindering the spirit, constitutes the comic in the novel.

Bellow draws upon four sources in Henderson's nature to create the humor in the novel and highlights Eugene Henderson as a comic hero by dramatizing that Henderson proves to be his own ironist. These sources can be subsumed under the general heading of the body's encumbrance of the spirit. The first is Henderson's highly affective nature, that is, his intense and sometimes unruly feelings and rushes of emotion, which often forces him to act in contradictory and inconsistent ways. The second source of the comic lies in Henderson's unsophisticated manners and robust speech, his slang idiom, and rugged humor which Henderson initiates, all of which tend to highlight the incongruity of a character rooted in the physical world seriously pursuing spiritual development. Thirdly, Bellow finds a source of comedy in Henderson's exaggerated sense of fate, in his obsession with personal misfortune and mortality. Ironically, although Henderson demands a special fate and strives to find meaning and value, his relentless brooding and rebellion against life's

terms ultimately take on a comically rigid and incongruous quality in terms of the uncommon advantages and material wealth that Henderson enjoys. The fourth and most important source of comedy stems from Bellow's ironic dramatization of Henderson's concerted attempts to deny the inescapable needs and desires of physical being. This denial becomes as comic as Henderson's gigantic body itself, in that his body repeatedly demands to be recognized.

Henderson is thus, as a consequence, comic because his spiritual quest is inevitably hindered or encumbered by what he cannot escape, namely, the limitations and peculiarities inherent in his somatic nature. Bergson defines this source of the comic as one in which the "soul /is_7 tantalised by the needs of the body."[9] According to Bergson, the comic is produced when attention is called to the physical being when actually it is the spiritual faculty that is struggling to seek expression through a resistant body. Bellow continually fuses the seriousness of Henderson's spiritual aspirations with the comedy of Henderson's attempts to deny his body as it obstructs the spirit. For always before us is Henderson's immense and stubborn body, to use Bergson's words, "perpetually obstructing everything with its machine-like obstinacy."[10]

Endnotes: Chapter 1

[1]The following editions of Saul Bellow's novels are the ones cited in the text: Dangling Man (New York: Avon, 1975); The Victim (New York: Viking, 1956); The Adventures of Augie March (New York: Avon, 1977); Seize the Day (New York: Avon, 1977); Henderson the Rain King (New York: Viking, 1965).

[2]Contemporaries (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1962), p. 218.

[3]Sarah B. Cohen, Saul Bellow's Enigmatic Laughter (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), quoting from Nathan Asubel, "Introduction: Schlemihls and Schlimazls," Treasury of Jewish Folklore (New York: Crown Publishers, 1948), p. 343, characterizes the traditional schlemiel as "the character in the Yiddish folk mind who is both affectionately and contemptuously regarded as "an awkward, bungling fellow.../who/ is forever getting in his own and everybody else's way and /who/ spoils everything he attempts"(p. 93).

[4]Radical Innocence: The Contemporary American Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 320-22. See also Contemporary American Literature: 1945-1972. (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co. 1973), pp. 27-30.

[5]"Saul Bellow: The Illusion of Environment," Contemporary Literature, 1 (Winter, 1960), 62.

[6]"Reality and the Hero: Lolita and Henderson the Rain King," in Saul Bellow and the Critics, ed. Irving Malin (New York: New York University Press, 1967), pp. 87-88.

[7]"Idiomatic Language in Two Novels by Saul Bellow," Journal of American Studies, 1 (October 1967), 279.

[8]"Rider Haggard Rides Again," The New Yorker, 14 March 1959 p. 172.

[9]Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic, trans. Cloudsley Bereton and Fred Rothwell (New York: Macmillan Co., 1912), p. 50.

[10] Laughter, p. 50.

Chapter II

Bellow's Comic Treatment of Henderson

In dramatizing Henderson's spiritual experiences and psychological conflicts, Bellow stresses that one cannot escape or flee the human limitations and foibles, the intense emotions and desires, the appetites and longings, and the acute sensibilities which are all inextricably part of human existence in the physical world; nor can one escape or ultimately deny the chaos and harshness of life in the death-dealing world. Bellow's comic mode illustrates a serious theme. Man must accept, and thus cope with, the flaws and limitations of his somatic nature directly in relation to his situation in the framework of the immense and modern society of which he is inescapably a part and ultimately in the context of the death-dealing and enigmatic universe. For Bellow, in other words, Henderson must unconditionally accept and embrace these unchangealbe conditions and terms of life as a prerequisite to living a meaningful and satisfying existence. These compose the given for Bellow, the requirements exacted by modern existence that must be met in the on-going battle to cope with one's self and the world.

Bellow has expressed his preference for comedy "as /a/ more energetic, wiser and manlier"[1] mode of expression than complaint in dealing with the predicament of individuals who attempt to cope with life and also find meaning and value in it. Yet the comic elements in the novel also

illustrate Bellow's awareness that man's creatureliness need not be repugnant and that it is certainly not inconsequential. Bellow reacts against both orthodox optimism and orthodox pessimism, the notion of romantic striving after self-perfection and the notion of human impotence, because he is acutely aware that man is comic because his spiritual quests inevitably hindered or encumbered by what he cannot excape, namely, the fate of being human. Nevertheless, Bellow views the conflict between body and spirit as a source of comedy rather than of tragedy.[2] This conflict represents the on-going struggle of man to find menaing and value in existence and also to aspire to new levels of awareness by fighting to overcome the limitations and deficiencies imposed by his somatic nature. Therefore, Bellow's comic vision is not ruled by absurdity; rather, it is informed by a spirit of compromise in that Bellow cherishes the aspiring nature and refuses to view man's existence as paltry or insignificant. In addition, Bellow's awareness of the difficulty of the struggle also encompasses the realization that man's spiritual quests must be, at times, comically qualified--especially when the struggle is particularly intense or difficult--because man is deficient in the knowledge of human limitations. Therein lies the seriousness of Bellow's comic mode and the uniqueness of his imaginative technique.

Highly Affective Nature

The first source of the comic stems from the ironic way in which Bellow draws upon Henderson's highly affective nature, his intense and sometimes unruly feelings and rushes of emotion, to show that Henderson's questing spirit and emotional make-up are not mutualy exclusive entities operating independently of one another. Consider, for example, the initial sketch of his life in Connecticut. The humor arising from Henderson's intense and sometimes unruly feelings and rushes of emotions stems from the often contradictory and inconsistent ways Henderson acts while on his spiritual quest; and, in fact, it underlies what Bellow calls Henderson's "movement and random action."[3] For example, Bellow has Henderson seriously attempting to communicate with the spirit of his deceased father by playing his father's violin, an exercise in emotional discipline. Yet, ironically, Bellow also dramatizes that Henderson defeats his own ends because as Henderson's emotions swell at the thought of communicating with his father on a spiritual level so does his anger about his lack of finesse as a violinist. Enraged, Henderson ends up strangling the delicate instrument with his powerful fingers, fingers better suited for wrestling and gelding hogs--at which, he relates, he is quite adept--because the music which the instrument emits is "like smashing egg crates"(p. 30). Thus Henderson's highly affective temperament causes him to "bungle" this exercise in

emotional discipline. And this same intense emotional make-up, though it has its roots in Henderson's basic goodness and concern for others, becomes responsible for other instances of contradictory behavior. For example, when Henderson is caught up in the "disorderly rush" of his disillusioned life and loses his temper over such an inconsequential matter as an abandoned cat on his property, he works himself into such a frenzy that he tries to shoot the poor animal in his own home as if it were a dangerous wild animal. In addition, Henderson, incensed, perversely prefers to settle a dispute with Lily's tenants--who complained about a lack of heat--by rudely evicting them rather than by remedying the situation(pp. 88-92). At other times, when his wife requires that he participate in family matters, he threatens suicide and rudely insists upon having his own way. Such actions are certainly not fitting for one who is trying to make sense of his life, but they do serve to illustrate the incongruity of the desires of Henderson's aspiring spirit and the earthbound weight of his somatic nature ironically failing to comply with these demands.

Perhaps Bellow's best illustrations of Henderson's affective nature defeating his spiritual ends and personal development are found in the encounters with the Arnewi and Wariri tribes in Africa. One finds Henderson elated by the opportunity that he finds to help the Arnewi tribe alleviate the water shortage. Here, Henderson feels that

at last he has found a way to put his "service ideal" (p. 86) to good and practical use. Unfortunately, Henderson causes unexpected destruction by destroying the tribe's entire water supply with his "homemade" bomb and thus ironically defeats his own ends of humanitarian service and of finding himself. In this ironic mishap, Bellow dramatizes Henderson, the old soldier, man-of-action figure, unintentionally bungling his own attempts at personal development and humanitarian service by unintentionally wreaking havoc when intending good.

In a similar fashion, Bellow continues his ironic portrayal of how Henderson's characteristic rushes of emotion and intense feelings obstruct his spiritual faculty by having Henderson attempt to deal with the awesome responsibility connected with his newly acquired position as rain king of the Wariri tribe. At first, Henderson's love of the contest and tests of strength inspire Henderson to lift Mummah, the tribe's fertility goddess, whom the tribe's strong man perennially fails (deliberately!) to lift. At this point, Henderson's spirits soar because he has succeeded in distinguishing himself through his own great strength and physical prowess. Yet, to his surprise, Henderson learns that his title and the duties of the position leave much to be desired. He is humiliated, beaten, and stripped of his clothing; and, as he soon learns to his dismay, he must be the successor to the throne if Dahfu should fail to capture Gmilo. The irony is that while Henderson rises to the requirements and

expectations of the test in keeping with his love of brute physical strength and physical activity, he derives neither pleasure nor inner peace from his efforts because of the consequences of his deed. In fact, Henderson becomes so depressed by the consequences of his actions that King Dahfu must spend considerable time "instructing" this man of action about the harshness of the tribe's customs. Clearly, Henderson's emotional chaos and depresstion seem antithetical to his love of the test, since he cannot accept, nor is he prepared for, the consequences of his actions. Depressed, Henderson is ironically brought low by his emotional unrest and insecurity over his inability to meet the requirements of his position. His laments and complaints may seem unrelated to the robust and adventurous Henderson; yet they serve to illustrate Bellow's use of ironic contrast to highlight the incongruity of Henderson's affective nature belittling or comically qualifying his questing spirit and love of the test.

Unsophisticated Manners and Robust Speech

Bellow draws upon Henderson's unsophisticated manners and robust speech, his slang idiom, and his rugged humor to dramatize the dichotomy between Henderson's spiritual aspirations and his bodily reactions to the proddings of his soul. This second source of the comic highlights the

incongruity of a character so clearly rooted in the physical world seriously pursuing spiritual development. At times, Henderson's slang idiom and his rugged humor seem to belittle the wants of the soul because they are not in keeping with one on a spiritual quest. Thus, they tend to make Henderson appear, to use Bellow's words, "the absurd seeker after high qualities."[4] Even in Africa, Henderson can seemingly speak only in city metaphors and about city events. Only in fantasy could Dahfu, someone unfamiliar with such metaphors and events, comprehend their meaning. Yet Dahfu does comprehend; and this incongruity intensifies the humor. An example of this humor is Henderson's metaphoric description of his "condition" as follows: "I am to suffering what Gary is to smoke. One of the world's biggest operations"(p. 260). Also, only in a fantasy could such a person as Dahfu be expected to understand such idiomatic speech as: "I'm no Milktoast but a person of strength and courage. Plenty of moxie" (p. 171), and "Say King! What's that? Oh, Jesus--come again? The pumps of the firmament? Isn't that the dandiest!" (p. 173).

Despite his attempts to flee the influences of the modern world, Henderson invariably dramatizes that he is very much a product of modern America. Bellow shows that Henderson cannot escape or run away from the influence of his modern environment or from his characteristic manners and mode of expression. In short, the modern world and

his experiences as a soldier and as a man of action maintain their influences upon him. For example, Bellow has Henderson explain his feelings about the frogs thusly: "'Poor little bastards' was what I said /about the frogs/ but in actual fact I was gloating--yuck-yuck-yuck!"(p.89). This self-assured attitude contrasts with the spiritual enlightenment which Henderson undergoes as a result of the Arnewi adventure. His relationship with Mtalba and the bomb catastrophe transform Henderson from an impetuous, self-assured individual to one who sees his life's pattern revealed in a series of bunglings and who thinks that "after such a revelation death might as well ensue as not"(p. 111). However, this enlightenment is short-lived as evidenced by his later flippant and irreverent remarks to the Wariri goddess Mummah. Bellow has Henderson say, "Hi-de-do, old lady. Compliments of the season. How's your old man?"(p. 241).

The deliberate emphasis on the unpolished and irreverent in Henderson contrasts ironically Henderson's rough exterior and his spiritual aspirations. Bellow takes great pains to show that despite Henderson's great desire to free himself of his fear and anxiety his innate credulity and willingness to be instructed ultimately lead him to revert to such an expression as "My heart was moved to such an extent that I felt my face stretch until it must have been as long as a city block"(p. 215) to communicate what are unquestionably serious feelings and perceptions. The comedy of this spiritual questor speaking in terms

laden with city images of smoking steel mills and city block and such idiomatic expressions as "Milktoast" and "moxie" stems from the seeming incongruity of such expressions flowing from such a seriously questing man as Henderson.

Bellow draws upon Henderson's robust diction and the humor which Henderson initiates with the serious intent of showing that rooted in the human condition is the irony of man's personal characteristics, his flaws and peculiarities, frustrating or blocking the communication of the soul's ultimate need. The underlying serious of a spiritual quest--though at times ironically qualified by the influence or appearance of rather comic peculiarities in thought or modes of expression-- is unquestionably pressent. These comic or incongruous characteristics actually surface or attract attention only when the struggle is particularly intense or difficult. Thus, the seriousness of Bellow's comic mode is once again made strikingly apparent when Henderson desperately tries to communicate to others his ultimate spiritual need.

An Exaggerated Sense of Fate

Bellow's third source of the comic--the brooding over a fate which does not seem cruel--is likewise linked to the fate of being human in a world of harsh circumstances and inexplicable events. The comedy that Bellow finds in Henderson's exaggerated sense of fate and obsession with

personal misfortune, death and decay, ultimately evolves from Henderson's ignorance of the truly uncommon advantages and material wealth that he enjoys, from his inability or refusal to perceive that he is unbelievably "lucky" in terms of escaping the annihilation and chaos that he perceives around him. In other words, although Henderson demands a special fate and embarks upon a quest to find meaning and value and thus ease his troubled soul, his relentless brooding and rebellion against life's terms ironically acquire a comically rigid and incongruous quality because Henderson becomes a puppet to his psychic inelasticity or rigidity, and this often times underlies what Bellow calls Henderson's "movement and random action."[5]

The irony of Henderson's relentless brooding lies, Bellow shows, in Henderson's concerted efforts to view his life as being inordinately more pathetic than it really is. In doing so, Bellow dramatizes in Henderson's obsession with what Bellow calls the "misfortunes of the sovereign Self"[6] that when the concern with personal misfortune and mortality are allowed to get out of hand a psychic inelasticity results, and this can often be a source of comedy. For example, although Henderson seeks what all human beings seek, that is, inner peace, his obsession with death and decay often belittles his deeper spiritual needs and in fact leads him to act in highly irresponsible and inappropriate ways. Henderson's acute awareness of his mortality and impending doom at fifty-five

perversely dominates his psyche to such an extent that this decorated war hero ironically begins to identify with the plight of his pigs--those "clever doomed animals" (p. 21). He had become a pig farmer because the thought of such an occupation, as Henderson explains, "maybe illustrates what I thought of life in general"(p.20). In addition, at times, Henderson's behavior becomes rather comic, if not irresponsible, when he perversely prefers to ignore his family and become what might be called a "romantic" grouch. Henderson becomes enraged with Lily when she reminds him that he works very hard at being miserable and then storms around the house, "frisking" his huge mustache and threatening Lily with suicide(pp. 5-7). At other times, Henderson's disillusionment over his failure to distinguish himself and live up to the greatness of the family name forces him to act like a "bum" by getting "swearing" drunk, often before noon, and by breaking bottles with a slingshot on the beach of a fashionable resort(p. 7). The irony is that while Henderson is blessed with uncommon advantages and a loving family, he fails either to perceive or to accept his boon, preferring to make his existence more chaotic and devoid of happiness that it really is. One cannot help chuckling at Henderson's concerted attempts to cling steadfastly to his own perception of personal misfortune and misery at the expense of others and at his obsession with the comic distortions which arise from his rebellion

against life's terms.[7]

Even before the African adventures, Bellow highlights the comic qualifications involved in Henderson's perverse brooding about death and pain and decay through Henderson's reaction to American life. Bellow finds that Henderson's deficient or limited perception can at times be a source of comedy. For example, it leads Henderson to draw some unusual conclusions about his life in the modern world, conclusions which ultimately become comically qualified, that is, limited in scope, in terms of Henderson's desire to gain a sense of things permanent or large. For instance, while chopping wood, Henderson concludes after being struck in the nose by a piece of wood that "Truth comes in blows"(p. 23). At other times, Henderson equates such events as falling off a tractor while drunk and being attacked by medics for having the "crabs" with the death-dealing forces which he perceives around him and which have taken his father and brother from him. The irony of these conclusions is that certainly a spiritual questor as energetic and sincere as Henderson should be capable of reaching more profound conclusions than these. Conclusions such as these become as ludicrous and comic as Henderson's response to the death of Miss Lenox, the housekeeper, to whose skirt Henderson pins a rather ridiculous "DO NOT DISTURB" sign (p. 39) to insure that the corpse would not be disturbed until the coroner could make his investigation. It is from such a life that Henderson flees, rushing off to Africa with

hardly a thought for his family or poor Miss Lenox.

Bellow's point, then, is that Henderson's exaggerated sense of fate and his obsession with death and decay sometimes force Henderson to act rashly and against his better judgment, in a manner not in keeping with a decorated war hero with the responsibilities of a middle-aged family man. The irony is that although Henderson has faced many dangerous situations and has managed to survive the pain and bruises of harsh existence, he still manages to allow his obsession with personal misfortune and mortality to overrun his better judgment. Bellow dramatizes that even a fortunate man like Henderson can fall victim to certain deficiencies in perception and thought, shortcomings and psychic rigidities inextricably linked to the quest for meaning and value. Underlying the comic or incongruous is the soul struggling to aspire beyond and above the limitations imposed by an obsession with death and decay.

The Inescapable Body

The fourth and most important source of the comic stems from Henderson's ironic attempts to deny or transcend the inescapable needs and desires of his physical being itself. Henderson's efforts to ignore the influence and demands of the somatic become almost as comic as Henderson's immense body itself. The more Henderson

tries to ignore or quell these demands and claims made by his body, the more apparent and plaguing they become. Yet his concerted efforts to deny his somatic nature are also ironically qualified by Bellow in that Bellow takes great pains to show that Henderson's gigantic body refuses to be ignored and makes its existence known--often at very inappropriate times and in rather comic ways.

According to Bergson, the comic is produced as a consequence of the "stupidly monotonous" body obstructing the aspiring soul with its "machine-like obstinacy" by making claims and demands which prevent the soul from aspiring to new heights. Bergson defines this source of the comic as arising from the "soul tantalized by the needs of the body." The body then loses its suppleness and varied energy and becomes instead "a heavy and cumbersome vesture, a kind of irksome ballast which holds down to earth a soul eager to rise aloft."[8] Applied to Henderson, Bergson's formula illustrates how Henderson's gigantic body with all of its desires and sensibilities repeatedly blocks or refuses to comply with the demands of the spirit and in fact at times seems to belittle and defeat Henderson's efforts to rise above them. Yet Bellow carries the irony of the body obstructing the soul a step further and makes it more subtle by having Henderson attempt to deny or escape the very thing that makes him a living being in the physical world, his somatic

nature. This denial becomes as comic as Henderson's gigantic body itself, because his physical being demands to be recognized and makes its existence known at very inappropriate times and in rather unusual ways.

The irony of Henderson's attempting to deny his somatic nature is that while Henderson expends great amounts of energy trying to transcend the "distractions" imposed upon his spirit by his body, his body--often rather comically--refuses to be ignored. In fact the body makes its demands most insistently--ironically belittling and defeating Henderson's attempts to transcend them--when the spiritual experience or struggle is the most intense. As a result, then, attention is called to the somatic in Henderson when it is actually the spirit that is concerned. Therefore, the comedy which stems from Bellow's imaginative technique of dramatizing Henderson's spiritual quest, ironically qualified by his concerted efforts to deny his somatic nature, ultimately insists upon the fusion of the seriousness of Henderson's spiritual aspirations and the comedy of Henderson's attempts to deny his relentless body as it obstructs the spirit.

In several striking examples of Henderson's struggle to deny his somatic nature, Bellow shows that the body inevitably betrays the spirit. For instance, Henderson falls into states of moodiness and despair because he has failed to duplicate the accomplishments of the distinguished Hendersons. He places the blame for his failure

on his body's insatiable desires and wants; for ironically, Henderson frequently becomes the recipient of the amourous advances of various women at highly inappropriate times and in seemingly odd places. Certainly, Henderson is not always prepared for such advances, especially when they occur in such inappropriate places as Mlle. Montecuccoli's dentist's chair and in Grand Central Station. The irony of these occurrences is that while Henderson is trying to ease the chaos in his mind by confronting existence on a spiritual level, he cannot quite transcend the realm of the physical and "submits" to the various amours quite willingly, only to be appalled later by his actions. The comic overtones evoked by such seemingly incongruous conduct as touring the great cathedrals of France in a drunken stupor stem from the irony of Henderson as spiritual questor failing to respond to the historical significance and religious beauty which surround him: "And I began to drink, harder than ever, and was drunk in every one of the great cathedrals--Amiens, Chartres, Vezelay, and so on."(p.16). Truly, Bellow shows, Henderson is as much a person rooted in the physical world as he is a questor after spiritual serenity, and his desires to transcend the physical ultimately become ironically qualified by his responses.

The irony of Henderson's attempts to deny and escape his somatic nature is further highlighted by Bellow when Henderson is in Africa, where he hopes to escape the

"distractions" and chaos that he attributes to existence in the modern world. For instance, when Henderson is conversing with the Arnewi's Women of Bittahness, Henderson is deeply impressed with the spiritual serenity which these women possess and their wisdom; yet Henderson is made very aware also of Mtalba's intentions to marry him when she visits his hut one night, bringing with her a heap of ornaments, trinkets, and other such "junk" for Henderson to use as the major part of the "bride price" required to "buy" her. Ironically, although Henderson is not quite sure what to do about her sudden and unexpected interest in him, concerned as he is with spiritual development, he is nonetheless quite impressed by Mtalba's beauty. Clearly, this humorous event is not unlike those which Henderson has experienced in the modern world when, for instance, he is willingly seduced by Lily after his divorce from Frances.

Bellow's irony becomes more complex as he dramatizes Henderson's experiences with the Wariri tribe in that it seems to encompass all of the "maladies" and shortcomings that Henderson has complained about. It is here that Bellow attempts to point toward a compromise in the struggle between the somatic and the spiritual in Henderson. First of all, while conversing with Dahfu, Henderson is distraught to the point of distraction about his failure to live a meaningful life and laments in a cry of utter dismay:

"Oh, my body, my body! Why have we never really got together as friends? I have loaded it with my vices like a raft, like a barge. Oh, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Anyway, from these distortions owing to my scale and work performed by my psyche"(p. 182). Nevertheless, he is regularly impressed by "the density of naked women"(p. 153) in Dahfu's harem. Another clear example of the body's betrayal of the spirit--of, to use Bergson's mind set, the relentless body calling attention to itself when the spirit is concerned--is apparent in Bellow's illustration of the way in which Henderson becomes overwhelmed by fear during his lion initiation. Here in an exercise of physical and mental discipline, Henderson is required to act the lion, to absorb characteristics of the lion into himself as Dahfu has done. Although Henderson strives with all of his might to comply with Dahfu's demands, crouching on all fours in his "sad green pants with the stained jockey shorts"(p. 221), he is nevertheless frightened to the quick by the lion. As a result, his "roars" become almost as ridiculous in their strength as his rain king costume. Henderson ends up bellowing out almost incoherent "passages" from the Messiah and from the Old Testament because he is overcome by fear. Threatened, Henderson's physical being reacts to the intense fear in a seemingly absurd manner, unable to meet the requirements of perceiving the beauty and power of the

lionness as she rather "harmlessly" sniffs at Henderson out of curiosity.

A summary illustration of Bellow's way of highlighting the irony of Henderson's attempting to deny the influence of the somatic appears in Henderson's blunt plea: "What I can't understand is why, when fear has taken me on and licked me so many times, I still am not able to stand it"(p. 226). Plagued as the old soldier and decorated war hero is by the pain from his broken bridgework, Henderson makes some rather humorous but significant claims about the reasons his teeth bother him so much. Bellow has Henderson explain that "certain emotions" make his teeth itch. Then later Bellow dramatizes the irony of this claim by noting that Henderson grinds his jaws when he sleeps(p. 129) as an expression of the intense fear which his body contains. Yet perhaps the best illustration of Bellow's way of highlighting Henderson's special efficacy for denying the demands of his body is Henderson's rather absurd and incongruous conduct as Dahfu prepares to capture the "right" lion. Henderson is once again frightened to the quick when he hears the awful roar of the approaching lion and cannot accept the fact that Dahfu must venture onto a flimsy catwalk in order to drop the cage onto the cornered lion. Yet, just as Dahfu begins to complete this very difficult and dangerous task, Henderson takes out his wallet to show Dahfu

pictures of his wife and children, explaining in detail where the pictures were taken and how he nearly had, of all things, a nervous breakdown over a portrait that Lily had painted of herself. The irony of this is that the old soldier and decorated hero is terrified to the point of distraction (pp. 302-303) and rather ludicrously tries to lessen his fear by his, to say the least, ridiculous behavior at this very innappropriate time. Bellow shows that Henderson's attempts to deny the fear in his heart ultimately make him, at this point, a rather comic and absurd figure because his reactions are almost unbelievably inappropriate to the situation; yet Henderson's concern and love for Dahfu are genuine and deep.

The point emphasized and illustrated by Bellow's comic treatment of Henderson, then, is that man is comic because his spiritual quest is inevitably hindered by what he cannot escape, naemly, the fate of the body. For Bellow, the conflict between the somatic and spiritual in Eugene Henderson is central to the comic in Henderson the Rain King and heightens Bellow's serious theme that man must accept the human limitations imposed by physical being and also the chaos and death and decay which are inextricably part of existence in the world.

Bellow draws upon four sources in Henderson's somatic nature to highlight Eugene Henderson as a comic hero, all of which have been subsumed under the general heading of the body's hindrance or encumbrance of the spirit. These include

Henderson's highly affective nature; his unsophisticated manners and robust speech and humor; his obsession with personal misfortune and mortality; and, finally, his concerted attempts to deny the inescapable needs of the body and, in fact, the influence of the body itself. For Bellow, the irony arising from the incongruity between the expectations inspired by the spirit and the body's refusal to meet these expectations, the often ironic consequences of the body betraying or hindering the spirit, constitutes the comic in the novel and marks a fusion by Bellow of the serious and the comic into an acceptable fictional form.

Finally, Bellow's comic mode illustrates his serious point that Henderson must unconditionally accept and embrace the inherently human flaws and limitations in his character directly in relation to his situation in the framework of American society and ultimately in the context of an often harsh and enigmatic universe. Acceptance of these unchangeable conditions and terms of life represents for Bellow acceptance of the given. Henderson moves toward accommodation with self and the world by accepting responsibility for himself and for others. He returns to Danbury, Connecticut, his home, to meet head-on, we presume, the existence that he sought to escape and deny because he was unable to "justify" his wealth or duplicate the historical accomplishments of the Hendersons. Bellow has admitted in an interview that "One has one's character--

a given--and that's it. He had better be faithful to the given and if other people don't like it that's unfortunate."[9] Indeed, Bellow shows that Henderson experiences an awareness that is akin to a religious experience in that he learns to accept not only the unchangeable reality of his life in the modern world but also the social imperatives of his particular existence as a middle-aged family man.

Alfred Kazin relates an interesting anecdote about Saul Bellow which is appropriate to the discussion of the unconditional acceptance of the given. When a Fuller Brushman who had not been able to sell any of his wares finally asked of Bellow, "Won't you even take it as a gift?" Bellow is said to have replied, "I've been given the gift of life, and it's more than I know what to do with."[10] Applied to Eugene Henderson and his struggle to "make sense" of the enigma of his life, this statement characterizes the difficulty that Henderson experiences in dealing with the very generous gift of life that he has been given; it is, at times, more than he knows what to do with. First of all, Henderson must accept his mortality and end his attempts to deny or escape this inevitable part of life. Bellow has said:

> What Henderson is really seeking is a remedy to the anxiety over death. What he can't endure is this continuing anxiety, which most of us accept as the condition of life which he is foolhardy enough to resist. [11]

This means that Henderson must end his attempts to "work-

off" this anxiety by, for example, pouring concrete and picking fights and concentrate rather on improving the quality of his life in terms of his relations with his family. Involved in the unconditional acceptance of his life is the movement away from the purely selfish concern with the private and inner life which alienates him from others. Bellow pokes fun at Henderson for preferring to ignore the uncommon advantages he possesses and falling into fits of unearned wretchedness, but his serious intent is to show that Henderson must accept the unchangeable conditions of his life as the heir of wealthy estate and scion of distinguished statesmen and find meaning and value in the framework of these conditions rather than merely complain about his inability to "justify" these advantages. Bellow has said: "The private and inner life which was the subject of serious books until very recently now begins to have an antique and funny look... My welfare, my development, my advancement, my earnestness, my adjustment, my marriage, my family--all that will make the modern reader laugh heartily."[12] Yet, I'm sure it is no accident that Bellow begins Henderson with his hero giving a similar emphasis to his own personal complaints. Bellow clearly ridicules the unearned wretchedness of his hero's complaint: "A disorderly rush begins--my parents, my wives, my girls, my children, my farm, my animals, my habits, my money, my music lessons, my drunkenness, my prejudices, my brutality, my teeth, my face, my soul!"(p. 3)

Bellow shows that once Henderson begins to accept himself and the conditions and terms of life, he can then embrace life with all the energy he can muster. By confronting the given, Henderson learns that "for creatures there is nothing that ever runs unmingled"(p. 339) The awareness that Henderson gains encompasses the inextricable relationship between the beauty and terror of life, the desires of self and those of others, and, ultimately, the importance of love as a stay to chaos and death.[13] In "Deep Readers of the World Beware!" Saul Bellow states that "We need to see how human beings act after they have appropriated or assimilated the meanings"[14] that they have come to perceive or discover. Henderson's energetic dance over the Arctic coldness dramatizes that Henderson has indeed assimilated the importance of accepting both his desires and also those of the human creatures around him. He is now prepared to confront life on its own terms rather than complain as he formerly did about the intolerable demands it has placed upon him. Bellow sometimes blurs the distinction between the spiritual and somatic in Henderson to show that, above all, man must be faithful to his character and yet must also face the demands required by existence in the world.

Bellow never ignores the underlying humanness of the struggle toward accommodation. Bellow limns the twofold struggle of Henderson battling his somatic nature

and the world of superior and enigmatic forces to affirm the energetic spirit of Henderson and to celebrate the immense humanness of Henderson as he moves toward an acceptance of the given. Commenting on the situation of modern man, Bellow has said, "/W/e may be somewhere between a false greatness and a false insignificance. At least we can stop misrepresenting ourselves to ourselves and realize that the only thing we can be in this world is human. We are temporarily miracle-sodden and feeling faint."[15] In presenting Henderson's struggle to find meaning and value, Bellow shows that indeed Henderson never loses his immense humanness, even though he may try to deny the very thing that makes him human, his immense and energetic physical being struggling to meet the demands of the soul.

Endnotes: Chapter II

[1]Gordon L. Harper, "Saul Bellow--The Art of Fiction: An Interview," Paris Review, 9 (Winter 1965), 62

[2]See, for example, Sarah B. Cohen, Saul Bellow's Enigmatic Laughter, who suggests, "Although Bellow capitalizes on the humor springing from the tug-of-war between the spiritual and the somatic in his characters, he does not reject the somatic"(p. 9).

[3]Nina A. Steers, "Successor to Faulkner?" Show, 4 (September 1964), 38.

[4]Steers, p. 38.

[5]Steers, p. 38.

[6]"Some Notes on Recent American Fiction," Encounter, 21 (November 1963), 26

[7]John J. Clayton, Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), characterizes the comedy in this way: "The theme of Henderson... is this twofold comedy of life: the individual moaning or shouting 'I want,' reality replying, 'I am'"(p. 166).

[8]Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic, pp. 37-50.

[9]Chirantan Kulshrestha, "A Conversation with Saul Bellow," Chicago Review, 23 and 24 (Spring 1972), 13.

[10]Contemporaries, p. 221.

[11]Steers, p. 38.

[12]"Some Notes on Recent American Fiction," p. 28.

[13]John J. Clayton, In Defense of Man, gives the following very perceptive account of Henderson's underlying fear:

> Running from death, Henderson runs from reality. For reality, the given, is composed of beauty and terror--beauty built on a substructure of terror (the lion beneath Dahfu's palace)--and refusing to confront the terror, Henderson must refuse the beauty. The purest example is the lioness, to whose beauty Henderson, from fear, cannot respond. He also rejects a beauty which he feels comes to him through another's death. Feeling guilt,...at being a beneficiary, he cannot accept the beauty of his estate...(p. 175).

[14]New York Times Book Review, 15 February 1958, p. 34.

[15]"The Sealed Treasure," Times Literary Supplement, 1 (July 1960), 414.

Chapter III

Conclusion

Although Eugene Henderson is Bellow's most comically portrayed character, Bellow fuses the comic and the serious into an acceptable and significant fictional form through his treatment of this immense and energetic hero, highlighting the incongruity which often exists between the intense and seriously questing spirit struggling to aspire to new heights of awareness and the body's inability or refusal to comply with the proddings of this spirit. What makes Bellow's comic mode so imaginative and unique is that he takes great pains to show that the comic or incongruous characteristics or qualities inherent in Henderson's somatic nature actually manifest themselves when the struggle between the spiritual and somatic is particularly intense. In doing so, Bellow dramatizes that the comic qualities inherent in Henderson actually mark the inescapable and inextricable relationship between the body and spirit. Henderson is comic because his quest is hindered or encumbered by the inescapable fate of being human.

Saul Bellow highlights the comedy in Henderson's somatic nature to show that the flaws or limitations of physical being are not grounds for despair because they may limit or hinder the spirit. Bellow does not abhor the creatureliness of Henderson or consider it a trifle. Rather Bellow illustrates through his comic treatment of Henderson that

the body is essential to the functioning of the soul and therefore affirms both the somatic and higher faculties

Bellow's comic mode serves to highlight the on-going battle which modern man wages to overcome his limitations and to find meaning and value in life. Bellow denies both nihilism and the ascetic view. He shows that indeed existence is not senseless and that an aspiring nature is not absurd. Bellow does not view strict self-denial as the only measure of spiritual discipline. Rather, he places the locus of the struggle in a physical being rooted in the natural world to show that indeed both spirit and body are not mutually exclusive entities but faculties inextricably related to one another. In addition, Bellow's comic vision points to a compromise between the romantic notion that self-perfection is attainable and the pessimistic notion that man is ultimately impotent and thus destined to fail. Through Henderson, Bellow shows that although Henderson does not--and ultimately cannot-- completely free himself of somatic demands and limitations, he is nevertheless not defeated by them and thus not left a victim of emotionless observations. Rather, Bellow makes unmistakably clear that Henderson's move toward accommodation encompasses both an awareness and acceptance of his spiritual and somatic being directly in relation to the demands of reality in a physical world.

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